

# THE TELEGRAPH WIRE

## COMICS & CONIK

ISSUE 24

FREE!

### HO-HO-HOLIDAY ISSUE!

(th-th-th-that's all, folks!)



FOUR-STAR, DOUBLE-BAG  
COLLECTOR'S ITEM  
FINAL ISSUE

Howell '75



Melody Rondeau, animation artiste extraordinaire, came up with this lovely logo, the last for the WIRE. With apologies to Kama, my cat, I must say I'm flattered to be caricatured (this IS a caricature, isn't it, Melody?!?) and am glad to know what I look like with an electric afro-do. Melody is currently hard at work on a collaboration with a lesser-known writer from Palo Alto on what they hope will eventually be a comic book.

Welcome to the last edition of THE TELEGRAPH WIRE; I should qualify this by saying that the WIRE is going on an indefinite hiatus. Because of the finality of this edition, I've tried to put as much editorial in here as possible. This meant that I had to leave out a couple of advertisements and I apologize to the advertisers for this--it was a difficult decision.

So what's in store for the last issue, you may ask. Markalan Joplin and I respectively interviewed Richard Howell, currently pencilling the VISION and the SCARLET WITCH, and Louise and Walt Simonson. Louise is currently writing POWER PACK and Walt, of course, writes and draws THOR. We used article format instead of the question-and-answer format that has become a hallmark of the WIRE. I think it sums up the talents of these remarkable Marvel artists and writers.

If you've ever caught yourself wondering why you still buy, read, and collect comic books, you'll want to turn to Mark Burbey's BIRD ON THE WIRE for a hilarious conversation that Mark carries on with himself.

I'm proud to say that, by George, I think I've got all of Tom Whitmore's SF SIDELINES column this time! I hope he's pacified and if you need to know what all this fuss is about, just read my one and only JUGHEAD ERRORS at the end of this editorial.

Tom Roman's column wraps it up with a look at the ten best comic books, in his opinion. And I agree with him one hundred percent.

John Barrett, our illustrious publisher, could not be with us this issue because of his busy schedule. However, the writer of ECCENTRIC EVOLUTIONS sends his warmest season's greetings.

As for myself, I'm glad I had this chance to work here and wish you all the best. We will meet again in this industry, so keep up the good taste in comic books!

#### JUGHEAD ERRORS

>>> No, Mark Burbey didn't become illiterate when he left California. It was due to the editor's fried brain by the time the final edits were ready. She was too tired to give them one more look so the typos would be eliminated.

>>> I overlooked the DC party that was given at Irving Street in San Francisco when typing up the Comics & Comix Calendar. I'm sure a good time was had by all.

>>> Guess what? Yet again does the editor score for the Jughead team--Steve Moncuse not only draws THE FISH POLICE but writes it as well. I gave the credit to someone else in my review last issue. Is there no end to this boy's talent?

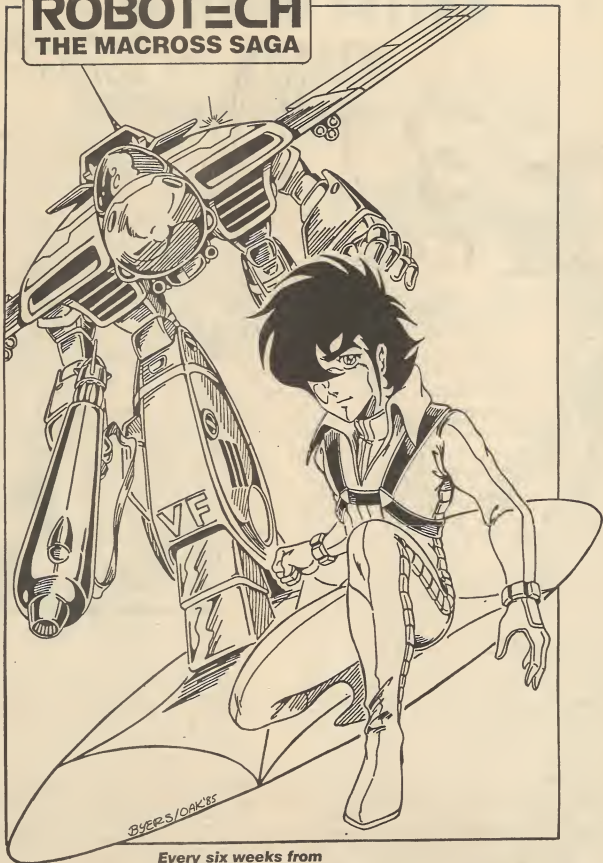
>>> This one's a biggie: The Lombard profile should have had Laura Givens' byline as writer and purveyor of beautiful artwork. The drawings are drawing a lot of attention...

>>> And while I'm admitting my jugheadedness, I am hereby shouting to the whole world that Tom Kee's favorite artist is not George Perez as the Palo Alto profile many issues back had mentioned.

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# ARTIST WITH A VISION by Markalan Joplin



Self-portrait by Richard Howell.

Carl Jung would've had a field day with this. My first published article was an interview with Steve Englehart, who had at that time just come out with his first novel. The interview was for COMICS FEATURE, and my editor there was Richard Howell.

Years later, in conjunction with another Englehart-related project (the 12-part VISION & SCARLET WITCH series being published by Marvel), my Fearless Editrix, Wendi Lee, innocently inquired if I'd be interested in doing an interview with the series' penciller, who turns out to be—synchronicity!—Richard Howell. The opportunity to interview my old editor was too good to pass up, so I found myself on the phone to New Jersey several days later, chatting it up with an old acquaintance.

Howell, like many of the "new" talents in the industry today, has been around the scene for several years. In addition to pencilling and editing, he has been a writer, inker, letterer and production man at various stages of his career. He could almost put out his own comic book—in fact, did so while he was in college, creating what was easily the best-remembered of his early efforts, PORTIA PRINZ OF THE GLAMAZONS, "The World's Foremost Pseudo-Intellectual Super-Heroine".

"PORTIA was a concerted attempt on my part to introduce a lot of new character types into comics, and take the super-hero even further out of what had been established, to what could be considered an adult level. I was part of this sub-set of students at Radcliffe who were comic book fans, and we all felt that stereotypes were not being avoided enough." But, heartened by the efforts of the writers of the day, such as Gerber and Englehart, they started to think that maybe more intellectually-stimulating comics were going to be where it was at. "It looked like the next wave was about to break," Richard recalls, "and I figured that since I was here drawing comics at the Intellectual Hub of the Universe, I might as well catch the crest of that next wave."



PORTIA the Glamazon.  
(C) 1979 R. Howell

PORTIA spent a good bit of her five-issue run with her tongue in her cheek as well. "Part of the way I viewed it was: either you have to be very, very sure that the story's conflict is life-or-death important, or you ought to allow yourself the opportunity to undercut it a bit as you go along."

Unfortunately, that mythical "next wave" never materialized for Howell. By the time the first issue of PORTIA PRINZ came out in 1977, most of the "Marvel Renaissance" creators—Englehart among them—had already given up and quit, and the realities of self-publishing (including a disastrous deal with a small publisher that resulted in not being able to publish his own character for a year) eventually took their toll.

Some time later, Howell came to the attention of Hal Schuster, who headed up New Media/Irjax. The company was solely a distributor back then, but it was Schuster's dream to be publisher as well. To this end, he came up with COMICS FEATURE, the second-oldest general interest comics magazine still being published (after THE COMICS JOURNAL). The magazine had been edited by a pre-Eclipse

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## Howell continued

Dean Mullaney who was about to move on, and Schuster already knew Howell's longtime associate, Carol Kalish (now an executive at Marvel). The team accepted NMI's offer, and began editing COMICS FEATURE with #6.

Along the way, the publisher began an ambitious line of black-and-white magazines, each devoted to a particular theme: ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED, FANTASY ILLUSTRATED, HEROINES ILLUSTRATED, ROMANCE ILLUSTRATED, and the like. Howell was tapped for the editorial chores on these new titles as well. "Actually, I was just shepherding a lot of this stuff along, since so much of it had already been commissioned by the comics line's original editor, Peter Gillis, who most people probably know as a writer for Marvel (MICRONAUTS, ETERNALS) and First (SHATTER, "Blaze Barlow"). That accounted for between half and two-thirds of each book." But Howell made his own imprint on the book as well, commissioning the four-part "Djinn" serial by the Steves Englehart, Ditko and Leialoha, for example, and "Rayder" by Mark Evanier, Mike Sekowsky, and Al Gordon.

Only two issues of the ILLUSTRATED line came out--one issue each of FANTASY ILLUSTRATED and ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED--before financial pressures caught up with NMI, forcing Schuster to file for reorganization bankruptcy and suspend the fledgling magazine line. News articles on the dissolution led to the conclusion that Hal Schuster simply extended himself too far by trying to put out so many new books at once--an analysis that Howell agrees with. "It's a pretty easy bug to catch in this business," he said. "Under the direct-sales system, you can practically make a profit on something before you even pay the printer. It seems like the returns are so immediate. But there were other factors behind the scenes, which eventually led to the suspension of the entire line. Those issues were, by far, the most expensive of anything we were publishing, and they never got on a regular publication schedule."

Some of the homeless properties were eventually

published elsewhere. Richard recalls a proposed Englehart creation for HEROINES ILLUSTRATED, "Roulette", drawn by one of Howell's artistic influences, original IRON MAN artist Don Heck. Nine pages had been drawn prior to the NMI shakeup, and have been sitting in an inventory drawer ever since. "Steve finally gave up on getting 'Roulette' published anywhere, and figured that the character could work into the story flow of CODYOTE easily enough, so she evolved into the character SLASH."

Around 1982, Richard moved from Boston to the Big Apple, "attempting to storm the gates at DC and Marvel and Archie Adventure and just about everyone else." He met with limited success, getting a six-pager here, a fill-in issue there. "I found that a lot of the freelancers knew me from reading COMICS FEATURE, or from the articles that Carol and I did, but off--for example--the six or seven editors who worked for Marvel at that time, maybe one of them had read my stuff. I was starting up from ground zero, that same as everybody else."

Beginning with a backup story written by another COMICS FEATURE alumnus, Kurt Busiek, in GREEN LANTERN #162 (the infamous "Exploding Baby" issue), Howell's work began showing up everywhere. For Marvel, he filled in for an issue each of CONAN and CODYOTE, and was tapped to complete an issue of INDIANA JONES left hanging by the untimely death of Gene Day. For DC, Howell's work appeared off and on in Roy Thomas-edited titles, such as ALL-STAR SQUADRON. And for Eclipse, Howell has pencilled DNAGENTS.

But it was this year when Richard's star finally started rising. He and writer Tony Isabella have been responsible for the rebirth of SHADOW WAR OF HAWKMAN on the heels of the successful SHADOW WAR OF HAWKMAN mini-series and winter's HAWKMAN SPECIAL, will get Richard his first regular monthly assignment. The first issue is scheduled for release next spring.

"HAWKMAN was, as we say in the trade, kismet," he recalls. "In all the many samples I had sent to DC, there was always at least one Hawkman page. I've always

continued next page



Hawkman and his ladyfriend, drawn by Richard Howell. (C) 1985 DC.

felt that I could draw a character better is I really liked that character, and the Hawkman pages always got the best reactions around DC. Well, as it happened, Tony Isabella was looking to get back into comics again, and had submitted the idea for a HAWKMAN series; the only thing holding him back was that he didn't have an artist." Through the efforts of Mark Evanier (who currently writes DNAGENTS and CROSSFIRE for Eclipse), the two were put together to produce the four-issue SHADOW WAR story. The series became a big success, attracting many favorable reviews and convincing DC to give the Thangarian lawman his own book once again.

Marvel readers have been enjoying Richard's work as well on the VISION & SCARLET WITCH maxi-series. "As a reader familiar with Englehart's former treatment of these characters, I thought he had set himself up a pretty interesting challenge, moving these characters forward, not back to where he had left them ten years ago. We discussed various directions for them, and Steve--speaking of challenges--decided to go with my suggestion of Wanda having a baby. From there the direction of the series was set."

One of the first things that had to be dealt with was Wanda's costume. It's mostly skin-tight material, along with some rather high-heeled shoes. None of that actually makes a lot of sense for a woman who's six to nine months pregnant to wear." So Howell came up with a series of "maternity" costumes for Wanda. "The first stage was her basic body stocking with a couple of pleats--she's only about three months pregnant then," and progressed to a more "flowing and flat-heeled" outfit with issue #9, which will probably stay as is until she delivers the baby in issue #12.

Aside from the changes in the costume, Howell is also attempting to redefine the basic features of the Scarlet Witch, going back to Don Heck's portrait back in the Captain America/Hawkeye days of THE AVENGERS (#17-30) for his model. "The Scarlet Witch's tiara went through sixteen or so metamorphoses over the years, but I thought Don's version (in issue #36 of AVENGERS) always looked the niftiest. He also gave her very distinctive,

somewhat angular features, and a singular hairdo. So without really changing anything, I'm sort of re-modifying her back to Don Heck's version. She's looking a lot more distinctive now, and even rather exotic."

Besides Heck, Richard also lists as artistic influences former SUPERMAN artists Jim Mooney and Kurt Schaffenberger. "It was comparatively quiet stuff, but focussed a lot of attention on the characters' faces and postures." With the discovery of Jack Kirby's work for Marvel in the early Sixties, "I found an opportunity to keep what I already liked artistic, but to make it work a little more dynamically." Once his style began to emerge, "very little has denied it since. I've always resisted mixing different styles into my work, willy-nilly, preferring to have a body of work that is cohesive and looks like it came out of one source--in this case, me."

Has he had any offers to reprise his role as a writer or editor? "Right now, I'm finding it difficult to get anybody to even let me ink my own work," Howell replies. "At DC, for instance, there's more inkers than they have work for." And as a writer? "I submitted eighteen different plot synopses in my first year of trying to break in. All the ones which were read were bought--that accounted for two of them. Last month, I sold a HAWKMAN fill-in plot, which I'll probably draw myself. Sounds just like the old days."

Eventually, Richard would like to go back to his roots and do his own book once again. "I'd like to do a solo project, one that I'd write and pencil and ink. It'd be a test for me, to see if what I have to say and draw really has a place in today's market."



Panel from DNAGENTS, pencilled by Howell. (C) 1985 Evanier.

But for the present, he's pretty happy with his present stage in life. "So far, I've had the opportunity to work with some of the people whose work I've admired for years. I'm drawing my favorite characters at Marvel and one of my two favorite characters at DC. I have a good relationship with all my writers and editors, and have even had a fair amount of say in what goes into my comics. If you don't count the fact that it's a lot of work--and I don't, particularly--then I'm doing real well, and I consider myself to be very lucky."

# Unsolicited opinion of a comics professional

“I don’t read much of *anything* regularly. I sort of skim, or skip and toss the stuff. But right now, I’m really enjoying *Megaton Man*, from Kitchen Sink.

“I think it’s great. I thought the first issue was flawed in that the satire was too specific, in that it was very much Marvel 1968—I showed it to my wife and I was falling out of my chair, and she didn’t laugh *once*. I showed her the second issue, and she thought it was a riot; the second issue is funny in and of itself. You know, it’s not funny simply because it’s satirizing old Marvel stuff.

“In fact, it almost seems that some of the stuff in there might be satirizing things *I’m* doing. They must be doing it just to frustrate me, *I know that.*”

—artist John Byrne,  
as quoted in *Comics Interview*

## MEGATON MAN

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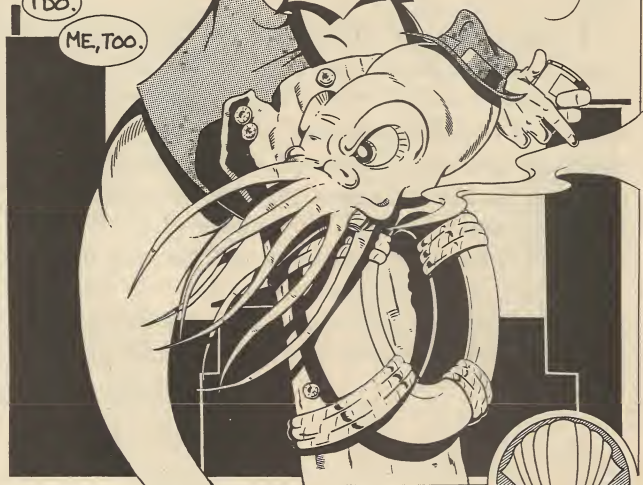
NO. 1

WANT  
ANOTHER  
BEER?

NAH.

I DO.

ME, TOO.



ALL THIS AND MORE  
IN EACH ISSUE OF ...



<sup>THE</sup> FISH POLICE





I may have touched on this subject in the WIRE before, but as I grow older, I find myself wondering why I'm still diddling with comic books. While I'm no longer as manic as I once was in my collecting, I still follow a good many artists, writers and titles. Instead of becoming less involved with comics, I'm getting deeper into them, deeper into the industry itself.

Still, every so often, I find myself trapped in the same schizophrenic conversation (perhaps a side-effect of too many years in San Francisco): "Hey pal, what the hell are you doing? Aren't you a bit old for this?"

Defensively, I respond with the usual, "What do you mean, 'old'?"

"Touchy, aren't we? Just look at what you're holding in your hands!"

"What, you mean this MR. MONSTER comic?"

"Exactly. I mean, what if Priscilla Barnes happened to walk by and saw you reading that? What would she think?"

"Priscilla Barnes, that luscious blonde who plays 'Terri' on THREE'S COMPANY, huh? My first girlfriend's name was Terri. Well, gee, she might think...hey, wait a minute, are you trying to undermine my self-esteem or what?"

"I'm only looking out for your best interests, pal."

"Yeah, well don't do me any favors, 'pal'. If Priscilla Barnes doesn't like that I read MR. MONSTER, that's her problem. Besides, she's married to some millionaire or something, so what the hell does she care?"

"That's easy for you to say now, but I'm telling you, if she were to walk by, you'd ditch that thing, but fast!"

"Don't be so sure. Anyway, what's to be so embarrassed about? Good artwork? Weird, amusing stories? Bizarre, tongue-in-cheek characters? Subtle hints of social commentary? Inspired coloring? Neat cover? Why should I be embarrassed to like something like this?"

"Hey, did I say anything about being embarrassed?"

"You didn't have to. I know what you're driving at. You don't have to run me over twice. Let me tell you something...comics are an artform unto themselves. They're a medium with unlimited possibilities. Comics are similar to film, theater, and even (shudder) television, but there's nothing quite like comics. They..."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. You don't have to remind me that you write for THE COMICS JOURNAL."

"All right, Mr. Snide, why don't you just tell me what better things I have to do with my time?"

"Well, you could be reading real books, novels..."

"I do."

"...going to movies..."

"I am."

"...listening to music..."

"I've been listening to music since I was born."  
"You could socialize, meet people, get acquainted with the real world..."

"I do all that. You, of all people, should know that. But there's room enough for comics, too."

"Yeah, but..."

"There are no buts. We're going to be dead all too soon, and if there's something you like, you'd better enjoy it now."

"Oh, don't remind me."

"Talk about getting acquainted with reality. Besides, if you're not reading comics because of what people might think of you, if you're worried about what the faceless masses are saying about you, then you're already lost. Go ahead, join the mindless crowd, the followers. Watch television. Go to a football game. Read a Jackie Collins novel. God knows those are more respectable pastimes than comic books, not to mention more socially acceptable ones."

"Well, actually..."

"Forget Will Eisner, Alex Toth, Los Bros. Hernandez, Frank Miller, Alan Moore. That's all just a bunch of juvenile stuff aimed at kids and regressive types. Everybody knows that."

"Actually, Eisner and Toth are good, and Jaime and Gilbert, and Frank, and Alan, and..."

"No, no, you're right. Comics are for idiots.

Comics are for the mentally and emotionally deficient. No self-respecting adult would be caught dead reading one. It's okay to read BEETLE BAILEY in the newspaper, but god, LOVE AND ROCKETS? No way, not unless you want to be a social outcast."

"I never said anything about LOVE AND ROCKETS!"

"I guess I was mistaken or high or something when I thought that Frank Miller's new scripts for DAREDEVIL were rich with character and drama and human substance, that Miller has a genuine skill for capturing indescribable quirks of personality and is able to express what's crawling through a character's mind with the greatest of economy and style."

"Now wait a minute..."

"I guess I was just in a muddle when it seemed like MOONSHADOW was probably the most adult comic book Marvel has ever published, that instead of engaging in tiresome superhero pyrotechnics, the book explores the depth of the human experience; of naivete, of growth, discovery, loss, and love. Yeah, if I'm going to be reading stuff like that, I'd best do it where no one will see me, like at the bottom of a deep, black hole, or in the bathroom."

"Okay, okay, you've made your point. You're right, I'm wrong, but I'll tell you something else..."

"What's that?"

"I don't think you'd like it if Priscilla Barnes caught you talking to yourself."

"Man, are you hung up! It's a good thing we left San Francisco when we did."

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GILBERT HERNANDEZ...IN A MARVEL COMIC? Yep, in MISTY #2, Gilbert designed a rather sexy bathing suit for Irina Robbins' new little STARlet. How come girls never looked like this when I was in high school?

See you at the racks and elsewhere, folks, perhaps where and when you least expect it.

# A Marvel-ous Couple!

by Wendi Lee



Thor in his new disguise from a recent THOR by Simonson. (C) 1985 MCG

Walt and Louise Simonson are well-known in the comics industry today. Walt has been a working artist in comics for thirteen years and when you mention his name to a comics fan, you usually get a bright look and a big smile as the fan recalls MANHUNTER. "Ah, MANHUNTER. That's got to be some of his most beautiful work..." is the usual response. Walt Simonson is now writing and drawing THOR, which is getting its own share of bright looks and big smiles over the Beta Ray Bill stories and Walt's inimitable artwork.

Louise Simonson recalls the first time she met Walt over the phone: "I had seen Walt's work before I met him. I was watching my friends' kids for a while and the phone rang: it was Walt on the other end."

"I was working out of Brooklyn at the time," says Walt, "and I had to talk to Archie Goodwin at the time about something. So I called up and I was greeted by this wonderful voice over the phone who told me that I drew great hands."

Louise laughs, "Oh yes, the hands he drew were marvelous. For me, this is one of the ways I can tell good art. The hands are good if they are expressive because they are so hard to draw. If a guy can draw hands, he can probably draw everything else. I went on and on about how nice his work was."

Walt counters with, "I didn't know what to say. I was talking to some strange woman on the phone who had a great voice and liked the hands I was drawing. It was a little while afterwards that I met Louise over at our friends' house. I knew her about a year before we actually began dating, which was just as well because I was a very shy date. It took me a while to get to know someone before I could date them."

"Yeah, then, watch out!" Louise smiles.

When you meet the Simonsons, you are aware that they are very much a couple, not unapproachable, but a very definite couple. There is a close, comfortable feeling that emanates from their togetherness. Louise, better known as "Weezie" from her husband and close friends, has been in the publishing field for fourteen years. She started working for Warren Publishing in a production capacity, doing layouts and paste-ups:

"I was kind of a 'girl Friday', I guess. I had worked in the advertising promotion department at my previous job. We published a lot of things—Sport Magazine, True Confessions, a lot of confessionals—great stuff. I learned to write brochures and I actually put out a sports calendar, believe it or not! I learned to do everything that was necessary. It was a very small department and if something needed to be done, it never occurred to me that I couldn't do it."

Louise Simonson has had a lot of experience in various capacities in the publishing field. She's become a sort of 'renaissance woman', a label that is apt and rightly earned. Within the last two years, she started writing a regular Marvel series, the acclaimed POWER PACK. POWER PACK is about four average middle class kids who are endowed with super-human powers—the four powers include control over energy, velocity, matter and gravity. Despite these powers being thrust upon them, the kids are still kids, not small adults, and they always get out of their adventures by themselves. The comic is one of the most realistic depictions of how a child would handle super powers. I asked Louise how she came up with such a wonderful comic book:

"When I was a child, I wanted to read books about what children did. I didn't want to read books about what grown-ups did and there were few comics written for me when I was ten. So I decided to write a comic for the child I was when I was ten; this was a book that I would have wanted to read and that's what POWER PACK is."

She went on to note that each of the four children in the POWER PACK family is taken from a different part of herself, "Alex and Julie are very strongly me. Jack is me when I'm in a crummy mood and Katie is probably me as I would like to be. Actually, they are also based on other people I know. Whenever you write a character, you write a little bit of yourself in them as you would like to be or a fantasy of yourself."

There are people who have contributed their personalities to some of the characters; a little boy whose name is Alex, kind of became 'Katie'. He was one of my daughter's friends long ago, a huge, very handsome red-headed kid who was the biggest two-year-old you've ever seen in your whole life. He would touch things and they would fall apart; one afternoon, he touched a radio, a fan, and an alarm clock—they all fell apart! He wasn't a bad kid, just very, very strong. When he touched things, they broke."

Louise elaborated on how she found her stories: "Children make their contribution, such as a story I recently did about Katie learning how to skate: she is very bad at it. Super powers don't help and her brothers' and sister's powers do help and Katie gets very, very frustrated."

"This story idea came to me when I was buying donuts in a bakery. I looked out the window and saw this little five-year-old trying to skate on those crummy little skates with the wheels that don't turn properly."

The kid was getting very, very frustrated by the whole thing! I thought that even if the kid had super powers, it wouldn't help. That was my story; the child just handed me the story."

While Louise was sort of working towards a writing career by working in production and editing, Walt took the next most natural step for any artist in comics today—he started writing as well as drawing. In approximately 1980 (just before it became fashionable to be an artist/writer), Walt was assigned to draw *BATTLESTAR GALACTICA*: "They needed a writer for it. I had been drawing various issues during the run of the book and had plotted for it for a while. So when the writer position opened up, Louise asked if I would be interested in writing it. Since Weezie was the editor, she knew it was something I'd been thinking of and she'd been nudging me in that direction, but I hadn't made the jump. I went ahead and wrote four of the last five issues of the book. It was the first professional writing I had done that actually saw print."

Jim Shooter was editor of Marvel at the time and he was really happy with the stories. In fact, Jim actually did his best to keep the book going against all common sense. The book was selling terribly and it probably went on a couple of issues beyond where it might have gone because Jim liked it a lot and he wanted to keep it going. There is always so much even an editor-in-chief can do in that direction in the long run, so the book actually folded. However, it did give me a leg-up on writing."

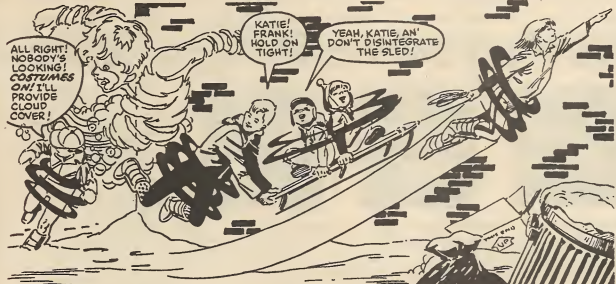
We discussed continuity in comicdom: "There are a lot of different tools an artist can use to create a drawing—composition, costume design, perspective, anatomy. And the same thing is true for a writer creating a story. He, too, has many tools at his disposal and continuity is one of them. For example, if Thor's face gets ripped off in one issue, it should still be damaged in the next. You don't come back and explain it away with a wave of the hand. 'Why, I used Bactine this morning and it's just great! My face has already grown back completely!' Keeping the details, big and small, consistent is continuity."

"At the same time, every comic book has old stories that everyone would just as soon forget. And it doesn't seem to me to serve any useful purpose to remember those tales and link them to current storylines for the sake of continuity as a garden that continually needs weeding."

"At the center of every good comic, there is a core that makes it worth reading. When I feel that stuff in the past harms that core, then I function as a gardener. I weed out whatever I think is choking the garden and try to give the good stuff room to breathe. In the end, that enables me to tell better stories. What it all means is that the continuity should be a tool, at the service of the writer; the writer should not be a waldo at the service of the continuity."

"No doubt when I get off Thor and some other writer takes it over, he'll have his own ideas about the value of the work I've done. And he may decide that the Simonson continuity needs a little weeding. He'll seek his own core to make the book work for him. Then the

Louise Simonson's *POWER PACK* kids: Alex, Jack, Katie, and Julie out for a spin! (C) 1985 MCG



Shortly after that, Walt was handed the three-part adaptation of *RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK* for Marvel as well as the graphic novel, *STAR SLAMMERS*. Halfway through the graphic novel, Mark Gruenwald (editor of *THOR* at the time) asked Walt if he was interested in taking over *THOR* as both writer and artist:

"Thor was my favorite character when I was a Marvel fan in the mid-Sixties."

"In the meantime, it was becoming the age of the artist/writer. Frank Miller was sharing studio space with us at the time and I had seen Frank do some wonderful stuff. It was very encouraging. I decided to take the plunge and try inking myself as well as writing and pencilling."

It was very rough. The first issue took me eight weeks to do and, of course on a monthly basis, that's not a very good sign. Two weeks, so far, is my minimum time to get an issue done. I work very steadily under pressure."

continuity will serve him as it has served me and dozens of other writers."

The subject of being a couple working not only in the same industry but the same company has intrigued me from the very beginning of this interview. I asked the Simonsons if there was any problem with working and living in such intense circumstances.

"I wish I had a longer answer but it's 'no'. I did some work for Weezie as an editor and we didn't have any problem working as freelancer and editor."

Louise elaborated on this, "It isn't a problem if you know that the other person is smart, has good opinions, and you are willing to listen. We listen to each other. It's also a matter of respect. You know that the person you're talking to has a good handle on things and you would be very stupid not to listen to them when they have something to say. It was never really a problem..."

continued next page

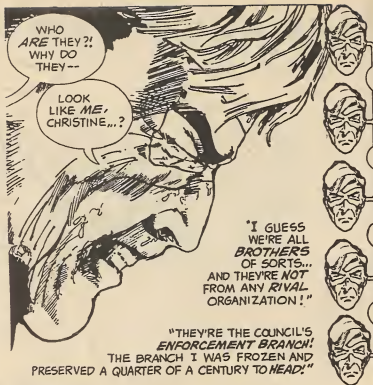
Simonson continued

At the time of this writing, there are confirmed rumors that the Simonsons will be doing a limited series together with Louise writing and Walt drawing.

Louise added that "we use each other to bounce ideas off ideas and get ideas from as well as feedback. Walt is really good at 'megathink' and I'm really good at the interpersonal stuff."

"We do a lot of trading back and forth." Walt joins in. "We both thought it would be kind of fun to work together on a strip sometime, but we haven't given it really serious thought as to what we'd like to do or if we'd like to do more than one issue of something, I'd love an issue of POWER PACK sometime."

While there was nothing set at the time of this interview, the Simonsons have since confirmed that they may collaborate on a limited series with Louise at the typewriter and Walt at the drawing board. While there was no talk of titles, anything that the Simonsons end up with will be worth reading. They put as much care into the comics they create as they do in this interview. Talking with the Simonsons was one of the highlights of my visit to San Diego. I hope they continue to write and draw for THOR and POWER PACK for a very long time.



Right: Panel from MANHUNTER, by Archie Goodwin and Walt Simonson.

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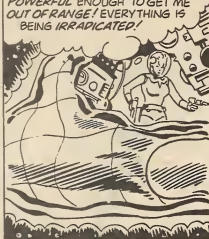


IF I COULD REMEMBER WHERE  
I'VE SEEN THESE SLIME-  
EATERS BEFORE, I MIGHT  
HAVE A CLUE AS TO WHAT  
THEY'RE AFTER!

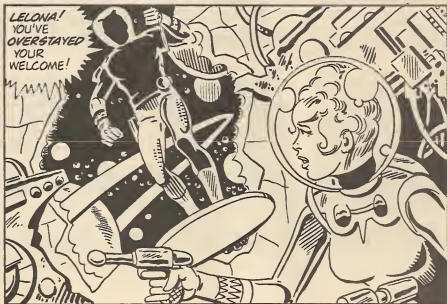


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BEING IRRADIATED!



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YOUR  
WELCOME!



STAR GUIDER!



# and Games!

By Steve Perrin

## A SHORT HISTORY OF SUPERHERO GAMES

The gaming world came to superhero gaming late. Part of the reason was a disinclination on the part of the main superhero comic book publishers to take the simulation gaming market seriously. When comic books were cancelled when sales fell under 200,000, the "small potatoes" world of Avalon Hill (foremost publisher of simulation games in the industry) and TSR (publisher of DUNGEDNS and DRAGONS) meant very little to them. Major game publishers like Milton Bradley and Parker Brothers might come out with an exploitative Superman or Spiderman game on an "Uncle Wiggly"-style board, but the "Majors of the minors", as Avalon Hill and TSR could be called, couldn't afford the upfront fees for these kind of licenses.

Some gaming authorities realized that role-playing games had a lot of potential for application to superheroes early on. In fact, O&O author E. Gary Gygas once editorialized against gamers playing "Comic book" versions of his game. However, the first attempts at straight superhero gaming were definitely flawed.

### Future Shock

The first set of such rules, titled SUPERHERO 2044, was self-published by the author, then reprinted by Lou Zocchi's Gamescience company as SUPERHERO '44. It featured elaborate campaign rules for running a series of superhero games, lamentably set in a future world in which alien contact, atomic wars, and other standard science fiction clichés had thoroughly changed the world.

The influence of DUNGEDNS and DRAGONS on this rule set are obvious and understandable, as O&O was the only popular, well-known role-playing game available at this time. As with O&O, characters are divided into character classes, three of them called "Übermensch" (Tarzan types), "Toolmasters" (Iron Man types), and "Uniques" (Superman types). No provision is made for the numerous crossbreeds in comics such as Batman (Übermensch-Toolmaster) or Spiderman (Unique-Toolmaster).

Just how one creates characters in these classes is less than clear. Moreover, these rules have definite clarity problems in regard to how combat works. Most of the unique powers are left to the gamemaster to adjudicate as they come up, while the gun and hand-to-hand combat is complex and bloody. In very un-comic fashion, characters die easily in the combats found here. Of course, one of the advantages of the future world provided with this package is a medical technology capable of regrowing almost anything as long as the brain is undamaged. Thus, rather than create rules to reflect the relative invulnerability of characters in comics, the author opted for "realism" and simply allowed the characters to live again--more or less as they do in O&O campaigns where Resurrection spells are easily obtained.

## The Vigilance Committee is Now in Session

The second entry into the superhero game scene was VILLAINS and VIGILANTES, written by teenagers Jeff Dee and Jack Herman, and published by Fantasy Games Unlimited in 1979. Both of these young men have matured and both now work in the comics industry, mainly for Comico.

This first version of V&V should not be mixed with its successor, which was revised by the authors and reissued in 1982. The first version also featured character "classes", based on type of origin and an over-complex and abstract combat system (since simplified).

VILLAINS and VIGILANTES was a definite step above its predecessor in describing how characters were created, and gave the player the chance to play himself with super-powers. However, the random nature of creating characters provided some disappointments. Your scribe, for instance, found himself with Heightened Weapon Expertise (as a founding Society for Anachronism member, I figured this must be a sword) and a minor grade of telepathy. Wow.

The effort suffered mainly from lack of support. Nothing further came from FGU and it more or less passed into history.

Somewhere in here, Jay and Aimee Hartlove self-published their own "Supergame". This was an elaboration and clarification of SUPERHERO 2044 set in the same sort of post-Holocaust superheroic future, but with much clearer rules for character creation. It suffered from contradictory combat rules and a distribution that couldn't get it out of southern California.

### Finding a Champion

So far, no superhero game has gone very far. This all changed when George MacDonald and Steve Peterson brought the CHAMPIONS game out at the 1981 Driggins game convention in San Mateo. Like "Supergame", it allowed the player to create exactly the character they wanted. Unlike most of its predecessors, it had an understandable combat system that seems to reflect some elements of "comic book reality".

Using a solid core of experienced play-testers to promote the game and lead new gamers through its complexities, MacDonald and Peterson took Driggins by storm. People were playing CHAMPIONS everywhere around the convention and having a ball! At this point, the game has undergone two revised editions and is still selling out regularly everywhere it is carried. George MacDonald and Steve Peterson are now Hero Games and manage to support themselves in the always tricky world of game publishing.

### Return of the Vigilantes

Seeing the sudden popularity of CHAMPIONS, Fantasy Games Unlimited moved to reissue VILLAINS and VIGILANTES in a revised edition. The new edition kept most of the



positive aspects of the old game, such as the ability for the player to play himself with super powers, and simplified the combat system.

V&V effectively provides the alternate to CHAMPIONS in superhero gaming. Where a CHAMPIONS character is carefully built up using an elaborate point system, a V&V character's powers are rolled for on a series of random tables. CHAMPIONS powers are explained carefully and balanced for similar effects with similar point values, V&V leaves interpretation of many powers--such as Mutant Power or Animal Powers--to the gamemaster and player, and almost anything can result. The CHAMPIONS combat system uses a relatively simple formula; the V&V system relies on a table that factors in the offensive and defensive facets of many different powers.

Each system has its own advocates. Some people prefer the CHAMPIONS character generation because they can feel like a comic book writer carefully crafting a character for publication (many CHAMPIONS characters were submitted as possible DIAL H FDR HERD characters when the series was being published by DC, much to editor Marv Wolfman's bemusement). Other people prefer the randomness of V&V as being just like it happens to people in the comics. They never know what powers they will receive.

#### The Inheritors

Each system has found its way into the games now available which use licensed heroes. The good folk at TSR, finally in the ballpark as far as getting a Marvel license, opted for the V&V style of character creation for MARVEL SUPER HEROES. Although they really don't encourage independent creation of characters, they do provide rules for it. Mayfair Games, on the other hand, picked the CHAMPIONS' style of point values for creating your own DC hero in the DC HERDES GAME.

As far as other games are concerned, the V&V form is usually used, often with a leavening of CHAMPIONS-style point values. HEROES UNLIMITED and GOLDEN HEROES both use the V&V method (though with different tables, of course). My own SUPERWORLD uses the CHAMPIONS system. My own preferences are fairly obvious in that choice, but as I have said, both systems have their advocates, and each style can be enjoyable for creating heroes and villains.

#### Finally

If you have any questions about the above games or any other games in the superhero genre (or any other genre, for that matter), write to me at:

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(Editor's note: Don Chin is currently on vacation; filling in for him is the film reviewer for the LONE STAR EXPRESS, Don Bob Briggs)

So there I wuz, October 27th, sittin' in my dad's van with two cute bimbos, watchin' GODZILLA: 1985 on the big drive-in screen.

The night got off to a horrible start--the snack bar wuz closed! No greasy popcorn. No stale, hollow malted milk balls. No soggy nachos. No nothin'. I wuz deprived of one Grade A upchucking (as opposed to Grade D upchucking where you barf because you DONT like the food).

Anyways, about the movie. Humongous lizard destruction at its best. Seems like Godzilla's been out hot-tubbin' in the ocean and decides to dry off on land. Where? Bet yer sweet asparagus it ain't Houston, folks. It's Tokyo. Detroit auto workers will love this flick because ol' G.Z. destroys the entire line of 1986 Datsuns, Toyotas, Mazdas, and Mitzi-poochies.

Seems Toho Productions spent lotta yen on this new Godzilla, makin' him computerized and what not. It shows. The new G.Z. don't look like a fella hoppin' around in a rubber suit; now it looks like a computer hoppin' around in a rubber suit.

Godzilla goes ona rampage and toasts Tokyo with radioactive vapor breath--we're talkin' MAJOR chronic halitosis here. He'd make a great politician, cuz he's always puttin' his foot down.

I don't know, but I think the reason why the big Lizard gets so doggone frustrated is cuz he ain't got no bimbo lizard. It's enough to make a guy eat a subway train after 25 years.

We're talkin' first degree body count in the thousands (with apologies to Rambo). Two hundred exploding cars. Nuclear reactors for dinner. No ninjas. Five jet fighter crashes. Wino sandwich. Thirty-five skyscrapers scrapped. Missiles in the mouth. Don Bob gives this one 3 1/2 stars.

An anonymous reader from California wanted me to mention his new comic book, ADOLESCENT RADIDACTIVE BLACK BELT HAMSTERS. I said I'd do it for five bucks and a year's subscription to CDSMPOLLITAN. He says it's full of funny stuff like hamster fu, nuns with machine guns, frogmen, barbarians, hockey player fu, one pint of blood, cosmic jello attack, nunchuk-wielding rodent and four breasts. It's due out in January--Don Bob says check it out.

---

#### DON BOB'S MAILBAG

---

Dear Don Bob:

Is it true that you have 3,712 illegitimate kids all across the United States?

Don Bob Rodriguez, San Jose, CA

Dear Don Bob R:

No. It's more like 3,715.

Dear Don Bob:

Do you read SECRET WARS II?  
Billy Goetz, Tampa, FL

Dear Billy:

Yes. I read it every night to put me to sleep.



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# ROMAN'S ARENA



BY THOM ROMAN

☝ : Recommended

☞ : Recommended with reservations/For fans, collectors, or other specialized audiences only

☹ : Send in the lions!

As Carol Burnett used to say at the end of her shows, "I'm so glad we've had this time together..." This marks the last the last issue of THE TELEGRAPH WIRE, and thus it means our final get-together in the Arena as well--which I suppose is for the best; a bi-monthly schedule works against something as time as reviews, and a quarterly one (which was briefly considered) would've been even worse. Perhaps the Arena will re-establish residence someplace else--I've been looking into doing something on the CompuServe network, for instance--but that's for the future to know. Right here and right now, this is the end.

As a parting gift, as well as in the spirit of the season, I'd like to present my Citizens of the Realm: my list of the ten finest independent comic books published this year. To those to whom these titles may be unfamiliar, I wish you all the joy I experienced when I picked them up for the first time. To those who know them already, I offer this list as a vindication of your obvious good taste, to see you through those rough times when other fans are laughing at you, while tucking their unread copies of SECRET WARS in plastic bags.

Merry This and Happy That to all of you--here's hoping that we'll all meet again someday!

## 1. MDONSHADOW

J.M. DeMattaie & Jon J. Muth (Epic/Marvel)  
I reviewed this one back in June, so I won't repeat myself here--except to note that this is the third recommendation I've given the book in the four columns I've done. Does this tell you something? And if that's not enough, how about this: MDONSHADOW is my pick to sweep next year's Kirby awards. It can't help but do it; it's the single most interesting and original story that has seen print this year, if not this decade. DeMattaie and Muth deserve every huzzah they get, as does Epic editor Archie Goodwin, who stuck Marvel's corporate neck out on this one to give the series the superior package that it deserved.

## 2. JOURNEY

William & Nadine Messner-Loeb's (Fantagraphics)  
Bill Loeb's rambling narrative about a semi-legendary trapper known as "Wolverine" MacAlistaire is a masterful blend of subtlety, high adventure, human drama and a generous dollop of good, old-fashioned tall tale telling. The art, too easily dismissed as "Eisner rip-off" by some fans, mirrors the rustic, more primitive setting of Loeb's frontier Midwest, and the action scenes pack an incredible punch. And the letter column has be-

come the focal point for a "family" of fans that stands fair to rival ELQUEST's. It's published infrequently--and soon may not be published at all, given Loeb's involvement with more commercially successful books as MR. MONSTER and Comico's forthcoming JONNY QUEST--so discover this one now, if you haven't already. This is the kind of stuff that comic historians will remember the Eighties for.

## 3. MAGE

Matt Wagner (Comico the Comic Company)  
Writer/artist Wagner's series--about a nondescript, cynical loser named Kevin Matchstick, who literally has greatness forced upon him as the hero in a war between light and darkness that he can barely understand, let alone believe in--is an elegant study in minimalism, disguised somewhat by his lush, inventive use of color. There are no space-fillers here; the action is cut down to the bone, giving the narrative a sense of immediacy that rivets the reader's attention to the story. And in terms of packaging, MAGE is the classiest-looking book to hit the stands since the original Capital run of the color NEXUS.

## 4. MYTHADVENTURES!

Phil Foglio (WaRP Graphics)  
Reviewed last issue. I'd gladly and happily go over it again, but I've only got so much space. So yay for Phil Foglio and yay for publisher Richard Pini, and on we go to:

## 5. ZOT!

Scott McCloud (Eclipse Comics)  
Alas, poor ZOT!; I knew him well--but a lot of fans didn't, dismissing it as a kiddie book, and the series came to an end with #10. But in those ten issues, you'll find a still-potent vein of pure magic. Nobody has given us an adolescent girl as genuine as McCloud's Jenny, nor as upbeat a hero as ol' Zachary T. himself. And the story--so silly-sounding at first blush--heroes and villains vie for a key that opens this door that's just sitting there in space--is handled with an expertise of craft that is as timeless as any major work of children's literature. ZOT! was a genuine reawakening of one's sense of wonder, and I salute all who made it possible.

## 6. NEXUS

Mike Baron & Steve Rude (First Comics)  
Along with MIRACLEMAN (which I excluded from consideration since it's a reprint title), NEXUS is the thinking person's superhero. Mike Baron has really given the concept of the superhero some serious consideration, and the situations he sets up for his near-invincible assassin of mass-murderers are always thought-provoking and always used to gain further understanding of Nexus the man. Steve Rude's stylish, original artwork is at once both as detailed as any Perez-oholic could want, but still stark and clear. It's what future artists are going to crib from. The book is also

populated with a delightful array of supporting characters; nearly every one of them have their own fan following, which speaks reams and volumes of the craft and care Baron and Rude have invested in this book.

#### 7. COYOTE

Steve Englehart & Charles Truog (Epic/Marvel)  
Another one that didn't last; the final issue, #16, should be out as you read this. Creator Englehart's premise was an interesting one: How far can you push the boundaries of the Comics Code, and still make it fun? An important consideration, since fun was what COYOTE was all about. Oh sure, there was the menace of the Shadow Cabinet and invaders from Venus and lots of heavy characterization as only Englehart can do it--but the heart of this book lies in such off-the-wall delights as Coyote's race with the ghost of James Oean, the hilarious drunken "team-up" with The Badger, or the sight of Coyote Woman wading into a crowd, dealing death with sound effects not used since NOT BRAND ECCH. Truog's neo-primitive art (which worked especially well in the "Coyote Legend" flashbacks sprinkled throughout the series), coming several weeks after the more polished efforts of Leialoha and Gulice, was an acquired taste that many fans did not stay and acquire. Their loss; COYOTE was a standout work, and could easily be to this generation what SPIDER-MAN was to Englehart's, given a good package and a regular schedule.

#### 8. CROSSFIRE

Mark Evanier & Dan Spiggle (Eclipse Comics)  
There's no hot geyser of imagination at work here; CROSSFIRE succeeds strictly on craft. Drawing from his many years of intimate experience in the entertainment industry, writer Evanier serves up solid plots, strong characters and light comedy which deftly walks the fine line between timeliness and self-indulgence, while ar-

tist Spiggle's almost impressionistic work here is easily some of the best of his long and checkered career. A fine effort that too many people are missing out on--which is unfortunate, since this is one of those rare titles which run single-issue stories, accessible to the casual reader. Compared to such pompous, in-crowd-only titles such as CEREBUS, CROSSFIRE is a breath of fresh air.

#### 9. THE ONE

Rick Veitch (Epic/Marvel)  
If CROSSFIRE succeeds in terms of craft, Rick Veitch's six-part series about a post-nuclear world where superheroes have become the next generation of weaponry, rates Thumbs Up for the fury and verve which fairly radiates off the page at you. Here and there, he stumbles a bit--I mean, c'mon, does anybody really use the word "shuck" as an expletive?--but there is vision behind THE ONE, and it speaks to all of us. And further kudos to Veitch for the imaginative array of covers that have graced this mini-series; they're terrific!

#### 10. MR. MONSTER

Michael T. Gilbert & William Messner-Loeb (Eclipse)  
David Singer could learn a lesson from Michael Gilbert. From an obscure character from comics' Golden Age, Gilbert has modeled a classic pulp hero for a modern-day audience in MR. MONSTER. The stories harken back to the bloody salad days of EC, but with a good absurdist twist, such as issue #2's "Hemo Boy" story, about a child born with a plasma bottle for a head who becomes the center of a travelling faith-healing carnival. And like Steve Englehart, the emphasis is on fun, even in the most overblown violent moments. Gilbert and Loeb have meshed their respective styles into a fine tapestry, and the superlative lettering of Ken Bruzenak is the perfect frosting on this well-done cake.

Heroes for all occasions (clockwise from top left): The One (c) 1985 Rick Veitch; Zot! (c) 1985 Silver Linings; Coyote (c) 1985 Steve Englehart; MYTHADVENTURES' Aahz & Skeeve (c) 1985 Asprin & Foglio; MAGE's hero, Kevin Matchstick (c) 1985 Matt Wagner; and Nexus (c) 1985 Baron & Rude/First Comics.





For those of you who thought the opening review in my last column was a little strange, you're quite right. The actual review got lost in a paste-up. As Wendi has grovelled appropriately and promised all sorts of reparation (but what would I DO with your first-born child?), I have agreed not to cause any problems. Here-tu the review, as it should have appeared:

I am an unashamed reader of children's books. In fact, some of the best fantasy I've ever read has been published as "for children", at least in hardcover. And one of the best publishers for hardcover children's fantasy is Atheneum. They published Le Guin's second and third EARTHSEA books, all of Patricia McKillip, McCaffrey's Harper Hall books, and most of Susan Cooper's work. And about three years ago, they published a first novel called GOD STALK by P.C. Hodgell. This was one of the few books to compare favorably with Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd and Grey Mouser stories; it combines humor, suspense, and characterization in a subtle, ever-changing blend.

I've waited eagerly for the next book since I read the first one and now it's out. DARK OF THE MOON (Atheneum/Argo, \$19.95) follows both the heroine of the first book, Jamethiel, and her twin brother, Torisen, as they move toward each other. Jame is trying to get the symbols of rulership of their father (a ring and a sword) to Tori so that his position as High Lord of the Kencyrath will be strengthened. Tori doesn't know that Jame is still alive, as they have been separated for many years; he's trying to deal with an invasion from the south consisting of a horde of three million tribesmen who have been harrying each other in a circle for hundreds of years. He also has to cope with the politics of the Grand Council, several of whom hope to gain personally from the fighting; and he doesn't know about the Changers (malicious shape-shifters) who are working against him.

Jame only has to cope with a trip to the land of evil power that is trying, once again, to engulf the world (both the land and the power are known as Perimal Darkling, which is confusing to some people). As with any good book, a plot summary can't do justice to the intrigue, careful development of character, or the beauty of Hodgell's imagination. This is a complex book which demands attention; it repays that attention better than the vast majority of fantasy novels. GOD STALK is now out in paperback from Berkeley at \$2.75. If you read it and don't want to read DARK OF THE MOON, I'll be very surprised.

Moving from a good book to a bad one, let's look at THRESHOLD by David Palmer (Bantam, \$2.95). I really have no idea why this book was published. From the opening sequence (which is clearly a ripoff of Heinlein's opening in GLORY ROAD) to a description of an inertia-less drive which is lifted directly from E.E. Smith, to a planet which is just Harrison's Deathworld blown up to the size of Vance's Big Planet, there is nothing original here.

I could question the psyche of any author who would have a 30-year old "self-made multibillionaire" who never seems to have done anything connected with

business, make love to a woman who is physically twelve (down to being without body hair), but the characters are so cardboard that even the kiddie-porn aspects aren't real. There is a slight chance that Bantam published this book because they thought it was funny; they are wrong. It's just dumb. If you want good space opera, go back to Smith or Williamson; at least their characters are made of thick cardboard.

For the half dozen of you who like fantasy short stories, there's a new anthology of original stories edited by Robin McKinley called IMAGINARY LANDS (Ace, \$2.95). Expectedly wonderful are the Patricia A. McKillip ("The Old Woman and the Storm") and P.C. Hodgell ("Stranger Blood") stories, though I wonder if anyone who hasn't read DARK OF THE MOON will understand the latter. It assumes the reader knows a lot about Jame's world and powers. A wonderful surprise is Robert West-all's "The Big Rock Candy Mountain", a story of American tourists in the England of old folk tales. Joan Vinge's "Tam Lin" is dull: perhaps she's been adapting too many movies; there's nothing in her story that isn't in the old ballad. My favorites are Peter Dickinson's "Flight" (an anthropological study, with footnotes, that says as much about the narrator's society as the society that he's studying: rather like Nabokov's PALE FIRE in that way) and McKinley's own piece, "The Stone Fey", a very unsettling tale of a shepherd's brush with legend. Jane Yolen and Michael de Larribielt both have good but not special stories.

Oops, I said I'd say something about Christmas books. With new books by Heinlein, Bradbury, Le Guin, Tolkien, and Asimov in hardback, it's not hard to find a good novel for gift-giving. At least consider giving a child an OZ book; Del Ray has started to reprint the Ruth Plumly Thompson books in trade (large-size) paperback, making them available for the first time in years. The calendar selection is a bit disappointing so far this year; Wayne Barlowe's calendar is gorgeous, as is M.C. Escher's, but Maxfield Parrish is just landscapes and the STAR TREK and RETURN TO OZ calendars both lack really good pictures. (An aside: I really liked the movie RETURN TO OZ and would recommend it to all. Don't expect it to be like the original OZ--it's not except for the fact that the scenes in Kansas last too long.) Try getting the Himalayan calendar or the Sacred Places calendar--both are from Golden Turtle Press in Berkeley; they're more fantastic than most of the ones marketed as fantasy.

Tom Whitmore is a well-respected member of the science fiction and fantasy field. A contributor to various fanzines, Tom is also co-owner of THE OTHER CHANGE OF HOBBIT, a fine SF and fantasy bookstore, located in Berkeley's Sather Gate Mall, at 2433 Channing Way.

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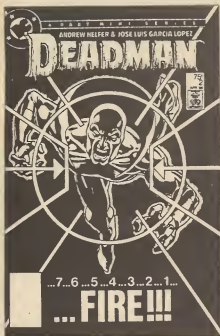
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**FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS**



(C) 1985 DC Comics, Inc.

DEADMAN

You just can't keep a good Deadman down. At least, that's the impression DC Comics would like to leave with readers of DEADMAN #1, first of a four-issue mini-series due out in December. Paradoxically, however, the first issue appears to raise more questions than it proposes to solve--riddles that were first posed in the above-average STRANGE ADVENTURES series, circa 1968.

But taking into consideration that this new mini-series successfully captures much of the flavor and nostalgic feel of the original series and main character, the 17-year hiatus may have been worth the wait.

Specifically, the mini-series begins after our hero, former trapeze artist Boston Brand, has tracked down and brought to justice the man responsible for his untimely death. Under the tutelage of his dubious mentor, Rama Kushna, Deadman assumes his ethereal spirit form and takes possession of the corporeal forms of living persons, both good and evil.

Even readers who are entirely unfamiliar with the Deadman storyline needn't despair: there is a brief recap of all that has transpired midway through the first issue of the mini-series. Furthermore, newcomer Andy Helfer (who wrote a couple of issues of the late, lamented ATARI FORCE) is a promising young writer with a flair for consistency and a gift for depicting raw, intense human emotions.

In one scene, for example, Batman makes a cameo appearance to advise Brand to forego wearing his Deadman costume. Batman eventually gives in to Brand's wishes but advises, "There you go, Brand--take it. But--take it easy." Such brief encounters are repeated several times throughout the comic, in which some small glimpse of a character's personality may be revealed.

And then there is the visually stunning artwork of Jose Luis Garcia Lopez, former ATARI FORCE and TEEN TITANS illustrator. Lopez, one of the few underrated artists in the DC Bullpen, manages to preserve some of the realism, tension, and even some of the almost-psychedelic layouts first exhibited by Neal Adams in the original series. But Lopez also has his own style that is both detailed and expressive. The final full-page panel of the book, for instance, is both disturbing yet fascinating.

Although the first installment of the mini-series is rather slowpaced (many loose ends are tied up), there

# ALL IN COLOR FOR A BUCK-& A-HALF



(C) 1985 Marvel Comics Group

are several new subplots introduced. It would be premature, however, to assume that various dilemmas and storylines will be left unresolved by the end of the series. Judging from some of the bizarre artwork, however, chances are that Helfer and Lopez will not prove disappointing. After all, you can't keep a good team down.

--KEN HEIMAN

## SQUADRON SUPREME

Past reviews of this 12-issue series have usually ended up as thinly-disguised indictments of Marvel's alleged plagiarism of DC characters, with little to no opinion on the series itself. And while the current situation certainly provides ample grist for the opinion-mill--especially given Marvel's perhaps overzealous attacks on-parodies of their own characters--the politics are getting in the way of our appreciation of what is clearly the best-written super-team I have seen from this company since the David Michelinie AVENGERS.

Series scribe Mark Gruenwald has long been the "what if..." king at Marvel, and this shows through in the premise of SQUADRON SUPREME: a team of superheroes who decide to use their powers to literally change the world in an attempt to bring about Utopia on Earth. But to accomplish this goal, they have to effectively take over the world. This prospect doesn't sit well with a few Squadron members; one resigns in the first issue, and another leaves in disgust in #6. In between, we see such noble acts as the Squadron ending world hunger and the proliferation of guns, offering instead low-cost force-field belts for personal protection. But the Squadron's most controversial innovation is a behavior-modification device, originally designed to turn convicts into law-abiding citizens--even some of the Squadron's super-enemies are "B-modded," and are eventually inducted into the Squadron itself--but which provides other, less-noble temptations as well to one member, who brainwashes another member into falling in love with him in #4, and is subsequently expelled from the team two issues later.

It is to Gruenwald's credit as a writer that he has raised some hard issues, and has not taken the easy way out on any of them. We see conclusively that the B-Mod Machine can be of great benefit, without bad side-

effects--but we also see what it can do in the wrong hands. We see undeniable benefits in the Squadron's takeover--but there is still the ever-present spectre of fascism to deal with as well.

And the depictions of the characters themselves, however much they may owe to the original Justice League (which, given the current state of the J.A., isn't a helluva lot), are light-years ahead of any other super-team currently being published by any company. There is a genuine friendship between the team's members here, which extends to family and friends as well; couples invite each other over for dinner, and their kids play together. These are charming, human moments that provide a welcome respite from the usual tidal wave of trumped-up angst that pervades most team books, and we can thank Gruenwald for putting them in.

Artwise, the book fares less well. Bob Hall's pencils, with inks by John Beatty, were a synthesis of Chaykin and the Buscema/Janson-era DEFENDERS; still, it had a charm to it--the image that sticks in my mind is their ingratulatingly-smiling portrait of Hyperion. But with #6, Hall has been dropped, and we have been given utterly routine hackwork by a parade of Buscema-clones (including Big John himself doing layouts in #7). I'm aware that this is common practice with a lot of open-ended series, but is it too much to ask that a short-run series such as this manage to maintain a consistent art team? (And while I'm picking faults, I have got to say that the book's logo is one of the worst I've ever seen from Marvel; the two tiers of lettering aren't even on a true parallel!)

Yes indeed, there are reservations galore that one can hold against SQUADRON SUPREME--but if you can manage to set them aside, you'll be rewarded by a story that makes the "real people" of other team books look like the cardboard automatons they are. Here's hoping that Marvel will award Gruenwald, upon the conclusion of this brilliant effort, a series worthy of his immense talent, such as the geriatric X-MEN or the aimlessly-wandering AVENGERS. This is too fine a writer to leave mired in obscurity.

--MARKALAN JOPLIN

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# TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

In the spirit of the season, the news this month is chock-full of goodies and surprise announcements from the comics world.

Alan Moore fans who have been waiting patiently for more "D.R. & Quinch" stories will be pleased to hear that Eagle Comics is starting up a new American run of 2000 A.D. MONTHLY, set to debut early next year with the long-awaited "D.R. & Quinch Go to Hollywood" story. Other features have not been scheduled yet, although another Moore feature, "The Ballad of Halo Jones," is being considered as a possibility.

Deluxe Comics won a partial victory in its long, dirty war with JC Productions over ownership of the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents, when a judge ruled that the former Tower Comics characters had indeed passed into the public domain. Though other issues still have to be settled before the case can be dismissed entirely, Deluxe publisher David Singer has put WALLY WOOD'S T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS back on the schedule again, with issue #3 expected out before Christmas.

With the original first issue of TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES approaching the \$100 mark in places, Mirage Studios has made available a low-cost special reprint edition of TMNT #1, which is out now. Featuring four additional pages of "origin" sketches and a new, full-color wraparound cover, this special edition goes for the price of the original, \$1.50.

And Freak Brothers freaks have a bit of nostalgia to stuff in their stockings this year as well, as Rip Off Press introduces UNDERGROUND CLASSICS, a reprint title featuring rare, early UG stories. The first issue will collect early Freak Brothers stories from such long out-of-print sources as FEDS 'N HEADS and HYDROGEN BOMB FUNNIES. "Dealer McDope," by the late Dave Sheridan, will be featured in issues #2-3.

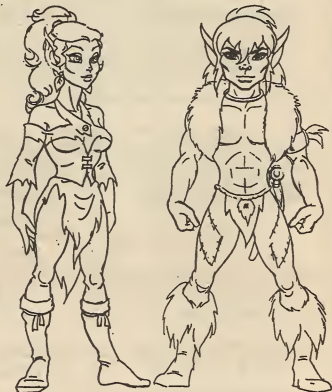
Marvel's Star Comics line, which recently went through a wholesale cancellation of their titles, plans a December debut for their most ambitious project yet: YOUNG ASTRONAUTS. The series will be an adaptation of the Saturday morning CBS TV series, which is based on a nationwide school program aimed at getting young people interested in space exploration. Safeway stores have been running ads for both the TV and comic book series on their grocery bags for a few months now. June (POWER PACK) Brigrum will be pencilling.

And another TV show goes four-color: Comico has announced the acquisition of one of Saturday morning's biggest legends, JONNY QUEST. As an added treat, the lead story in #1 will be written and drawn by original QUEST creator Doug Wildey. The regular series writer will be Bill Loebs, of JOURNEY and MR. MONSTER fame; he'll be doing the back-up story in issue #1, with art by Steve Rude and Mike Royer. No permanent art team has been chosen yet.

DC's big Christmas present, of course, was the recent announcement that Marvel mainstay John Byrne will be writing and drawing a new Superman title for them next year. The exact plans are still vague at this point; all that is certain is that it will be a new title, beginning with #1. It was not known by presstime whether Byrne's book will replace the regular SUPERMAN title, or will be a fourth title in the Superman line; nor was the format of the new book made known. To make room in his already-crowded schedule for the Man of Steel, however, Byrne has relinquished INCREDIBLE HULK with #319; former SECRET WARS artist Al Milgrom will take over scripting and art chores.

ELFQUEST fans, too, have a present awaiting them: CBS has optioned Wendy & Richard Pini's fantasy epic for a possible berth in next September's Saturday morning lineup. Wendy herself will be doing the "bible" and character designs for the series, which will be set during an unspecified time after the events in the ELFQUEST comic series. Animation will be done by Zander Associates; this will be their first major work.

Whether on the big screen or in the credit box at Marvel or DC, the names of Roy Thomas and Gerry Conway have almost always been associated with each other. The long-standing partnership continues now with the announcement that Roy and Gerry each have a new series coming up from First Comics. Conway will be adapting



Character designs for the new ELFQUEST animation series scheduled for next September's Saturday morning lineup. (C) 1985 WaRP Graphics.



Jonny Quest and his friends, due to be re-released as a comic book by COMICO in the near future. (C) 1964, 1965 Hanna-Barbera.

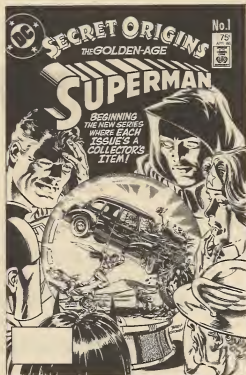


another Michael Moorcock property, HAWKMOON (currently being seen in the Thomas-scripted SAILOR ON THE SEAS OF FATE Elric series), with art by Rafael Kavanan and Alfredo Alcalá. Thomas' new project is still hush-hush as we go to press, but it's sure to be fun—the title, logo and mask design of the currently-nameless hero comprise one big in-joke for longtime Thomas fans who remember his days with the most famous of the early fanzines. Its name: ALTER EGO. Both books are set for a January release.

There's a new woman in Frank Thorne's life. Ken Pierce Books will present the collected adventures of Thorne's newest heroine, LANN, in a graphic album format similar to that of his earlier GHITA, in time for holiday gift-giving. Originally serialized in HEAVY METAL last year, LANN's title character is a space adventuress involved in "an epic adventure of high crimes, sex and thwarted passion." And like his previous role as Thenef the wizard, Thorne himself will vicariously share in Lann's adventures, this time as a character called Shard. The adults-only graphic album will cost \$5.95, and will be distributed by Eclipse.



Renegade's new series, SHERLOCK HOLMES, is due out in March of next year. (C) 1985 Dan Day



DC's new SUPERMAN series is due out in April of next year. (C) 1985 DC Comics, Inc.

TWISTED TALES returns—sort of. Eclipse will be releasing THE TWISTED TALES OF BRUCE JONES, a four-issue mini-series of stories both written and drawn by Jones in the early 70s (when he was an artistic contemporary of such stellar talents as Bernie Wrightson and Mike Kaluta). The first issue will appear in February, with subsequent issues coming out bi-weekly. Jones has also scripted three new stories for TALES OF TERROR and ALIEN ENCOUNTERS, which will also have work by Rich Corben, Tim Conrad and John Bolton in upcoming issues.

Following his work on the cancelled AZTEC ACE, Dan Day will turn up next at Renegade Press, where he will be drawing a SHERLOCK HOLMES series, with stories taken directly from the original Arthur Conan Doyle stories. Issue #1, featuring "The Beryl Coronet," will appear in March. Also coming up from Renegade is Joe Sinardi's MAXWELL MOUSE FOLLIES, a funny-animal strip set during the Depression. The first issue will contain a story that pre-dates Sinardi's earlier, self-published MF adventure.

Peace on Earth & Goodwill to Retailers: DC Comics, responding to what Marketing Director Bruce Bristow calls "a need for shared information in the marketplace," has begun distributing a series of four-page leaflets on various subjects of interest to the comics retailer. Comics & Comix's own John Barrett and Tom Walton have written two installments of this ongoing "How-To Manual," contributing leaflets on their respective fields of expertise: chain-store management and public relations. Way to go, guys!

And the WIRE's own Mark Burbey got a Christmas present of his own: beginning January 2, 1986, he joins Comico the Comic Company as their newest Assistant Editor! Congrats from all of us, Mark!

## Comics & Comix

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## *WHAT DO THESE CARTOONING GREATS HAVE IN COMMON?*

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**CHUCK JONES** (CREATOR OF *ROADRUNNER*)

**WILL EISNER** (CREATOR OF *THE SPIRIT*)

**GAHAN WILSON** (*NEW YORKER*, *PLAYBOY*, *NATIONAL LAMPOOM*)

**TRINA ROBBINS** (AUTHOR OF *WOMEN AND THE COMICS*)

**PHIL FRANK** (CREATOR OF *MILES TO GO*)

**MORRIE TURNER** (CREATOR OF *WEE PALS*)

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# BERKELEY

by Ann Eagan

I asked Ann Eagan of our Berkeley store to say a few words about each employee who works behind the counter at our Berkeley Comics & Comix. Smiling with sadistic glee, she did so in her own inimitable style, with a little help in copy-editing by Cynthia Ward. Thanks, Ann, for a great profile.



Pictured from left to right: Steve Perrin; Mike Ebert; Eva Emmert; John Stansfield.

STEVE PERRIN is first and foremost a game designer. His creations include ELFQUEST, STORMBRINGER, SUPERWORLD, and RUNEQUEST. Any confusion about game products—or anything at all—can be quickly resolved by Steve's vast knowledge and handy wit. Steve can be recognized by his pocketful of pens and his horn-rimmed glasses.

MIKE EBERT—aka "Tall Boy" or "Ebert-San"—is our reigning expert on Japanese animation. He knows the full story about current movies, book adaptations and toys. How he stays so well-informed without understanding a word of Japanese remains a mystery.

Mike studies at the San Francisco Academy of Art; that's why he's always walking around with art supplies and a big portfolio. His sharp artistic style will no doubt win him fame and fortune. To think that he almost took up medicine as a profession!

EVA EMMERT's good humor in the face of all silliness makes her an invaluable member of the Berkeley staff. A cappuccino and Pringles addict, Eva is a student at the California College of Arts and Crafts. Her enormous talent as an artist has resulted in her appointment as store sign-maker; she can draw with stunning accuracy any character in comics.

Through sheer persistence, JOHN "Stani" STANSFIELD finally won a place upstairs as old comic specialist and chief lunkehead. Gone are the days when he and his friend Mike would patiently wait in line to get their entire collections signed by Chris Claremont. Nowadays John is studying at San Francisco State University. As the youngest member of our staff, John gets more than his share of ribbing, but he's always ready with a good comeback.

JEFF COBURN is one of the newest additions to the Berkeley managerie, where his warped sense of humor is much appreciated. A ham salad addict and dedicated record collector, Jeff can be heard singing twisted lyrics as he pulls comic books for our Comic Saver list.

You may recognize the name STEVE MONCUSE: he rocketed to stardom with the recent publication of his acclaimed first comic book, THE FISH POLICE. The clear story-telling and clean artwork of the book more than adequately demonstrates Steve's skills.

In addition to his creative talents, Steve possesses an awesome knowledge of old comics. Ask him the most obscure question about Spider-Man: he's never been known to let us down.

Unlike the stereotypical artist or writer, Steve is no armchair athlete; during his off-hours, he can be found on the basketball court until Juanita calls him in for dinner!

LISA FUNG is another new employee who has something in common with Peter Grubbs—she has ten tropical fish tanks at home! She's working in our store while she contemplates life and the meaning of comic books and computers. Hope she finds the answer soon and lets the rest of us in on it!

Not only is JON FERRAS the possessor of the cleanest clothes in the East Bay, he is (we'll admit it despite his refusal to divulge the name of his laundress) the best manager of our Comic Saver program that we've ever had. His consistent good nature in the face of ongoing disaster in the Berkeley back room has earned him the title of "Gentleman Jon".

Jon is learning the secrets of economics at Saint Mary's College. He is a computer whiz and is probably the closest thing to a real live Yuppie that the Berkeley store will ever see!



Pictured from left to right: Steve Moncuse; Lisa Fung; Jon Ferras.

MICHAEL BENTLEY is the Berkeley store's assistant manager and, thanks to his experience at Dark Carnival Bookstore, our resident expert on science fiction and fantasy. He is also invaluable because of his knowledge (and possession) of the very best British music available in America. He is a poet and an artist, and a possessor of an outstanding wardrobe that puts the rest of the Berkeley staff to shame. Michael's off-the-wall responses to innocent inquiries keep us all on our toes. At the time of this writing, he is in India riding with the Guptas (Indian cowboys), but he'll be back in time to advise all our Christmas shoppers!

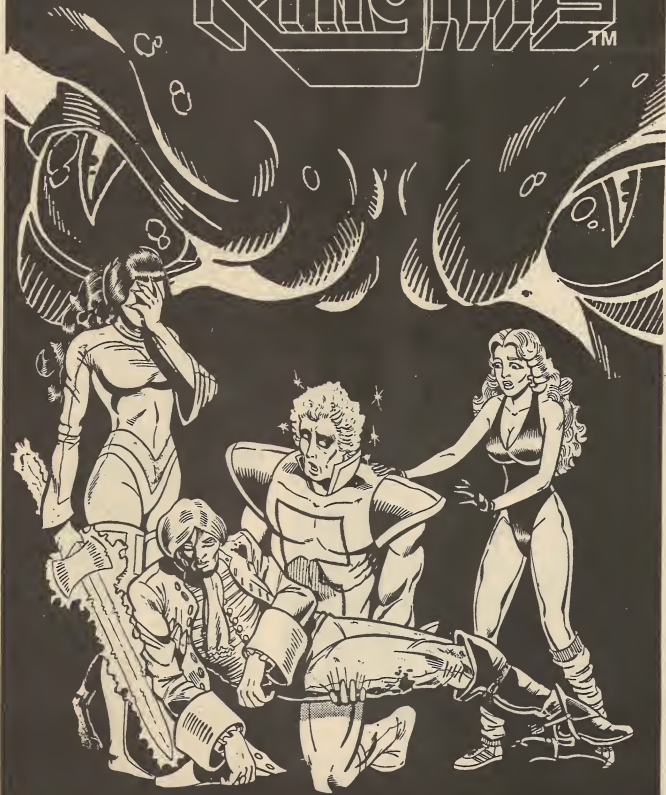
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# Southern Knights™





Pictured from left to right: Peter Grubbs; Peter Horwath; Chris Reynolds; Greg Look (manager).

Through constant trips to thrift shops, PETER GRUBBS has amassed a peerless collection of odds and ends--among them old toys, old games, and above all, dinosaurs and lava lamps. This collection is rivaled only by his assortment of tacky ties. His knowledge of old goods is matched by his expertise in out-of-print underground as well as above ground comic books. With his unerring ability to locate the obscure, he's your man for hard-to-find items.

A die-hard Grateful Dead fan and avid movie-goer, Peter will gladly share his thoughtful reviews of any and all concerts and films. Peter is a herpeophile (no, it doesn't mean what you think--it means that he keeps reptiles and fish).

PETER HORWATH is another new employee who remains elusive to us at the moment. However, knowing the rest of the staff as well as we do, he has to be pretty good at his job and a fun person all around. Without a sense of humor in Berkeley, a person could never take his job seriously!

How does one begin to describe a man who has run for mayor of Alameda, worked the night shift in a liquor store, and been employed by the U.S. Postal Service; whose favorite pastime is getting wild and trashing hotel rows in Las Vegas; and who understands everything Hunter S. Thompson says? Come to think of it, this describes CHRIS REYNOLDS perfectly!

GREG LOOK is the manager of the Berkeley Comics & Comic store, where he is known as "The Lone Re-Arranger". A graduate of U.C.-Berkeley, he is currently working on his MBA. But all is not as serious as it sounds: Greg's collection of Japanese toys is rivaled only by his appreciation of handguns and good-looking women. With his job, classes, and passions, it is surprising that he has any hours left in the day. Still, there are the nights which he all too often spends huddled late over the Mah Jongg table. Greg can always be counted on to need a wake-up call! Of his diverse interests, the one with the greatest priority is fishing. Staff meetings held at Greg's penthouse are always fun, with plenty of conflicting opinions and large pizzas.

\*\*\*\*\*



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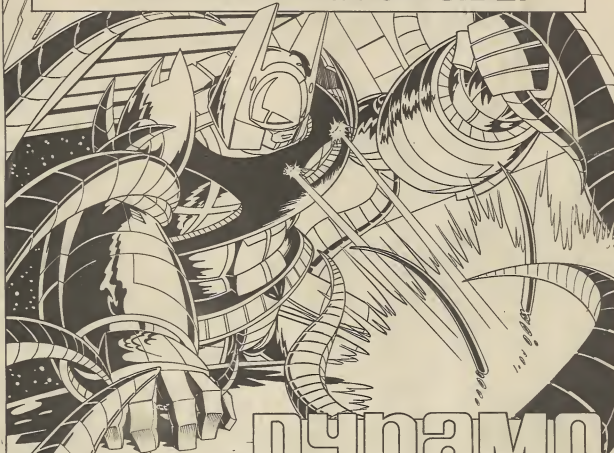
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